

# **JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA AFTER THE ARAB SPRING**

**Lucas Winter**

**Foreign Military Studies Office**

This paper examines the effects of the Arab Spring on Jordan and Saudi Arabia along four dimensions: political, economic, social, and regional/international.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

The effects of the 2011 Arab uprisings will continue to be felt throughout the region, both in countries that have experienced major political change and those that have not. The former include Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, while Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, and the Gulf monarchies thus far comprise the latter; Bahrain is an intermediate case. The effects of the Arab Spring will here be examined with respect to two countries, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Pressures on these countries' ruling regimes will be examined along four dimensions: political, economic, social, and regional/international. These four dimensions are interdependent – they overlap and interact in different ways in each country, producing varying impacts across time and space.

The political dimension looks at domestic pressures on the ruling regime, both from below (popular mobilization) and from within (elite cohesion). The economic dimension considers both the availability of state resources and the way in which they are distributed. The social dimension considers historically formed societal cleavages and political constituencies. Finally, the regional/international dimension focuses on external political pressures particularly through the lens of regional strategic alliances and political spillover from neighboring countries.

Why did the popular mobilization of 2011-2012 fail to “break the barrier of fear” in Jordan and Saudi Arabia? Which pressures will be strongest in each country in 2013?

## **PART ONE: Overview of Jordan and Saudi Arabia's Failed Arab Springs**

### *Jordan*

Jordan was one of the first countries to which Tunisia's popular mobilization spread. Jordan in 2010 was characterized by vigorous political mobilization, including protests by teachers and organized labor, public criticism of the government by a group of retired officers, and a broad opposition boycott of what were generally viewed as sham elections.<sup>1</sup> After long-time rulers

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the criticism by retired officers, see: Assaf David, “The Revolt of Jordan's Military Veterans,” *Foreign Policy*, 6/16/10. Available at: [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/15/the\\_revolt\\_of\\_jordans\\_military\\_veterans](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/15/the_revolt_of_jordans_military_veterans) (accessed 2/28/13).

were toppled in both Tunisia and Egypt, Jordan seemed a good candidate to be next in line.<sup>2</sup> Yet by the summer of 2011 Jordan's Arab Spring had blown over.<sup>3</sup>

The key turning point in Jordan's Arab Spring came on March 24, 2011. Protests had ebbed and flowed since January, and despite significant numbers of protestors, political pressure did not escalate as it had in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain.<sup>4</sup> The Arab Spring's signature slogan, "*al-shaab yurid isqat al-nizam*" (the people want regime overthrow), remained largely absent from Jordan's protests, which focused mostly on economic and, particularly, political reforms.<sup>5</sup> On March 24 Jordanian protesters, using the #march24 hashtag,<sup>6</sup> attempted to emulate Egypt's Midan Tahrir popular takeover by camping out in front of the Interior Ministry, only to be dispersed by pro-government thugs.<sup>7</sup>

The repression of March 24 proved fatal to Jordan's Spring 2011 protests, but was nevertheless followed by political and economic concessions – a new cabinet and the injection of capital directly into the economy. Cosmetic political concessions became commonplace (there have been four other prime ministers since then), but the economic largesse required outside revenues, given the country's growing internal debt. Saudi Arabia, wary of disturbances in the neighboring monarchy, was happy to be of assistance.

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<sup>2</sup> More on why Jordan seemed a good Arab Spring candidate available at: Pete Moore, "Why not Jordan?" *MERIP Middle East Report*, 11/13/12. Available at: <http://www.merip.org/why-not-jordan> (accessed 2/28/13).

<sup>3</sup> The March 2012 eruption of civil war in neighboring Syria made Jordan appear newly vulnerable. A year later, the kingdom's ambiguous policy toward Syria appeared a smart choice, and the feared economic and social impacts of the civil war appeared contained. These pressures, however, remain and may intensify.

<sup>4</sup> The week leading up to March 24 was pivotal throughout the region: protests in Bahrain were crushed, the Yemeni regime split, towns in several parts of Syria erupted in protest and Qaddafi's troops closed in on Benghazi. For more on this see chapter 6 in: Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising* (Public Affairs: 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Prime Minister Samir Rifai was pre-emptively pushed aside in February 2011 (after having been appointed in the wake of the November 2010 Parliamentary Elections). While this appeased some elements of the Jordanian protest movement, others were unsatisfied with what had become a predictable tactic.

<sup>6</sup> Arab Spring protests in each country were associated with a particular date and hashtag. Some of the more prominent ones include: #feb14 (Bahrain) #jan25 (Egypt), #14jan (Tunisia) and #17feb (Libya).

<sup>7</sup> The layout of Amman does not lend itself to the type of centralized protest that occurred in Cairo, Tunis, or Sana'. For more on this see: Jillian Schwedler, "The Politics of Protest in Jordan," *FPRI Newsletter*, 3/13/12. Available at: <http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/1701.201203.schwedler.politicsprotestjordan.html> (accessed 2/28/13). It is also important to note that these protesters are generally different from those organized by the "loyal opposition," most prominently the Muslim Brotherhood, which is able to mobilize the largest number of people without representing a challenge to the regime.

Jordan's political system has proven more malleable and resilient than that of most "Arab Spring" countries.<sup>8</sup> The likelihood of mass mobilization devolving into the type of segmented contention that has occurred in Syria appears unlikely. The challenges facing Jordan are nonetheless enormous.

### *Saudi Arabia*

As much as anywhere in the region, mass mobilization to voice political demands was hard to imagine in Saudi Arabia. Like only a handful of states in the region, the Saudi regime is based on a legitimating ideology (Wahabbism).<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, the regime is able to portray broader Arab Spring trends as foreign, contrary to the alleged natural order of Saudi Arabian society and Islam in general.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, extensive oil rents allow the regime to invest heavily in mechanisms for averting mobilized dissent. When it comes to containing or repressing political dissent, Saudi Arabia's regime has a broad array of tools at its disposal.<sup>11</sup>

In the wake of the region-wide euphoria – or concern for some – following the popular overthrow of Tunisia's Zine El Abidine ben Ali, some Saudi groups openly sought substantial reform. As with other countries in the region, activist Facebook pages mushroomed and social media became a key tool for mobilization. A Facebook group claiming significant popular support planned a mass protest for March 11 (#march11).<sup>12</sup> Yet with the exception of the country's Shi'a-majority Eastern Province, where protests broke out shortly after events in Tunisia, nothing of significance materialized. Reasons given for the absence of broad

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<sup>8</sup> Some have attributed this to its monarchical government, spawning a mini-debate among political scientists. See: "The Arab Monarchy Debate," *POMPEPS Briefings* 16, 12/19/12. Available at: [http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/POMEPS\\_BriefBooklet16\\_Monarchies\\_web.pdf](http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/POMEPS_BriefBooklet16_Monarchies_web.pdf) (accessed 2/28/13).

<sup>9</sup> Post-1979, where Khomeini's Revolutionary Shi'ism underpins state legitimacy, could be similarly characterized. Other Arab regimes (including Qaddafi's Libya), despite the revolutionary pretensions of their leaders, can hardly be called ideological.

<sup>10</sup> Because the Wahhabi-legitimated Saudi state is a modern innovation, portraying Wahhabism as indigenous or at least "natural" to the whole of Saudi Arabian territory is key to the regime's legitimacy.

<sup>11</sup> A cocktail of repression and economic incentives of varying strength is not its only means of quelling dissent. Saudi Arabia controls many of the key newspapers and TV stations in the region and – along with Qatar – has a strong influence on the way stories are reported. This is a third and crucial tool in the Saudi toolbox.

<sup>12</sup> Over 30,000 had expressed support on Facebook for the March 11 "Day of Rage," but few actually showed up. See: Rani Abouzeid, "Saudi Arabia's 'Day of Rage' Passes Quietly," *Time* 3/11/11. Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2058486,00.html> (accessed 2/28/13).

mobilization included the layout of Saudi cities, a lack of major economic grievances, the generally conservative and self-policing nature of Saudi society, and the kingdom's low level of tolerance for open dissent. With regard to the latter, Saudi Arabia's even modest mobilization movement, as compared to that of other countries, was remarkable.

Saudi Arabia's Arab Spring revolved around three main axes: regional Shi'a mobilization, rights-based urban protest and cyber-dissent.<sup>13</sup> Small protests among the country's eastern Shi'a population began as early as February 2011 and continued throughout the year.<sup>14</sup> Tensions spiked in the fall, when armed clashes between residents and security broke out in the restive town of al-ʿAwamiyya.<sup>15</sup> The cycle of protest and repression continued through 2012, peaking again in July, when prominent Shi'a religious leader Shaykh Nimr al-Nimr was wounded by a gunshot to the leg during his arrest. Since then, low-level protests have continued in several Shi'a-majority towns in the country's east although not in the mixed Sunni-Shi'a urban centers.

The mobilization that arguably received greatest international attention was a protest against the ban on female driving. On June 17, 2011, nearly 50 women took to the wheel as part of a civil disobedience campaign in various Saudi cities.<sup>16</sup> Although a woman's right to drive may seem of little consequence to regime survival, the fact that female driving is outlawed in Saudi Arabia is symptomatic of broader tensions that have been heightened by the Arab Spring, specifically, the uneasy coexistence of modernity and elite extravagance on the one hand, and an austere and intolerant primitivism perpetuated by the religious establishment on the other. This delicate balance, by which the Wahhabi establishment grants the ruling Al Saud family religious legitimacy to rule over Mecca and Medina in exchange for the Wahhabization of social order, has thus far held up. The Arab Spring, with its broad message of popular empowerment and broader citizen participation, however, poses new challenges to this arrangement.

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<sup>13</sup> The extreme Salafist challenge to the regime, of which Saudi Arabia's al-Qaeda problem of the first half of the 2000s is but one manifestation, has also mobilized peacefully, although not in numbers significant enough to warrant attention.

<sup>14</sup> See: Frederic Wehrey, "Shia Days of Rage," *Foreign Affairs* 12/10/12. Available at: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2012/12/10/shia-days-of-rage/essf> (accessed 2/28/13).

<sup>15</sup> For more on this see Toby Matthiessen, "A 'Saudi Spring?': The Shi'a Protest Movement in the Eastern Province 2011–2012," *Middle East Journal* 66:4, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> See: Jason Bourke, "Saudi Arabia women test driving ban," *The Guardian* 6/17/12. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/17/saudi-arabia-women-drivers-protest> (accessed 2/28/13).

The most important consequence of Saudi Arabia's "Arab Spring" has been the rise of online political activism. The anonymity afforded by cyberspace has given a voice to new government critics, most prominently a tweeter calling himself "@mujtahidd." Mujtahidd has provided an unprecedented view into the machinations and strife within the Saudi royal family. Online participation allows dissidents to circumvent many of the regime's key tools of social control, including surveillance capabilities and the ability to control the message.

The Saudi regime has used three main strategies to signal its approach to mass mobilization. The first is a policy of minimal tolerance, which has extended beyond the kingdom's borders and into the island city-state of Bahrain. The second consists of assistance programs to prevent economic grievances from materializing. The last strategy has been characterized by occasional and piecemeal reform efforts – for instance allowing women to serve in the Consultative Council – which are conducted with great caution, given the brittle nature of the ruling coalition. While this may help avert mass mobilization, the regime's main challenges lie elsewhere.

## **PART TWO: Key Challenges**

### **Political**

Politically, the Arab Spring's earliest enduring legacy is that the power of popular mobilization is alive and well in the Arab world and coalesces around familiar issues – greater justice, equality and participation. The end of the Arab Spring – at least its first wave – may have temporarily dampened the power of mobilization, as "authoritarian learning" kicked in, but pressure on the elite coalitions ruling Arab states will continue.

#### *Jordan*

In Jordan, the recognized opposition called for reforms rather than popular overthrow.<sup>17</sup> Their political demands are centered on transitioning to a constitutional monarchy. The key step in that direction could take one of two broad forms: allowing the direct election of a prime minister with powers to appoint his own cabinet, or, amending the electoral law and allowing parliament to nominate a prime minister with powers to appoint his own cabinet. There are numerous intermediate steps that could be created between the present order and substantive, irreversible reforms. This is what the Jordanian regime is doing. Since protests began in January 2011, Jordan has been through five prime ministers,<sup>18</sup> all appointed and dismissed by the king. In addition, cosmetic constitutional amendments were enacted and the number of seats in parliament was increased.<sup>19</sup>

The parliamentary elections of January 2013, which were boycotted by the opposition, were less of a watershed than expected; despite sporadic violence and a few deaths, participation was relatively high and the legitimacy of the elections was not contested. Politically, the Jordanian regime has a good deal of breathing room. Jordan can take more steps of equal substantive significance without an abrupt shift in the country's ruling coalition.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This was initially also the case in Bahrain. Jordanian popular demands relate to curtailing the power of the monarchy vis-à-vis the electorate. This includes reform of the electoral law, changes to how the prime minister and cabinet are nominated, and change to the power of the upper chamber (Majlis al-A'yan), which has veto power over all legislation and is appointed. See: Ziad Abu-Rish, "Jordan: The Limits of Comparison," *Jadaliyya* 2/2/11. Available at: [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/519/jordan\\_the-limits-of-comparison](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/519/jordan_the-limits-of-comparison) (accessed 2/28/13). Greater participation has for some time been the demand of Jordan's official opposition, whose principal force is the Islamic Action Front (IAF), Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood. The protest movement spawned by the Arab Spring, however, created several new, smaller opposition groups which, unlike the IAF, are not sanctioned by the monarchy. As with Yemen's youth protests movement, these groups have been unable to translate mobilizational fervor into political participation.

<sup>18</sup> They are: Samir al-Rifai (until 2/11), Marouf al-Bakhit (10/11), Awn al-Khasawneh (5/12), Fayez al-Tarawneh (10/12), and Abdullah Ensour (current, though soon to step down).

<sup>19</sup> The single-vote system dated to 1993 and favored rural areas over the urban population. The early stages of protests were quickly met with the March 2011 establishment of a National Dialogue Committee, a 52-member body comprising leaders from Jordan's political and societal groups. In the end, not much came of this committee. Electoral reforms for the 2013 elections included an increase in the number of seats in parliament from 120 to 150 and changing the electoral system to a one-man two-vote (district and national) system rather than the one-man one-vote system previously in place. See: "Jordan sets date for early parliamentary elections," *BBC News* 10/16/12. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19964073> (accessed 2/28/13).

<sup>20</sup> Note that Jordanian authorities will claim that an actual transformation has taken place. See for instance: Marc Lynch, "Debating Jordan's Challenges," *Foreign Policy* 2/18/13. Available at: [http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/02/18/debating\\_jordans\\_challenges](http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/02/18/debating_jordans_challenges) (accessed 2/28/13).

Jordan's loyal opposition – the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's party (Islamic Action Front – IAF) – can continue to mobilize large numbers calling for reform rather than regime overthrow. The ruling coalition is strong and fairly flexible, and the policy of elite rotation appears to be working.<sup>21</sup> The ruling coalition of urban technocrats and rural East Bank tribes has been further strengthened by “militarization of social welfare.”<sup>22</sup> Politically, the Jordanian regime is stronger than may appear; economically, its position is more ambiguous.

### *Saudi Arabia*

Saudi Arabia's political system is less flexible than Jordan's; even marginal political reforms are conducted with care, given the considerations of conservative elements within the ruling coalition and the fact that political pressures from below are not strong enough. The Shi'a, the kingdom's strongest mobilized disgruntled group, are neither numerous nor unified enough to present a strong challenge to the state. Although the regime may be unable to depoliticize or even demobilize its Shi'a population anytime soon, it has an array of tactics at its disposal to prevent the Shi'a issue alone from presenting a major challenge.

The key political challenge to Saudi Arabia's ruling regime emanates from within. King Abdullah is ailing, and two crown princes died in 2012. The current crown prince, Salman, is nearing 80 and in poor health (though better than his half-brother, the king). Salman is considered the final candidate to the crown from among the sons of the kingdom's founder Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, although the February 2013 appointment of King Abdullah's half-brother Prince Muqrin as the potential third in line complicates the picture slightly.<sup>23</sup> The proclivity of Saudi royals to have several children from different wives means that the next generation of

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<sup>21</sup> The policy of “elite rotation” witnessed in the prime ministership, some argue, could be extended to the crown itself, with Prince Hamzah taking over for his half-brother King Abdullah. See: David D. Kirkpatrick, “Jordan Protesters Dream of Shift to King's Brother,” *New York Times* 11/21/12. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/22/world/middleeast/jordan-protesters-dream-of-shift-to-prince-hamzah.html?pagewanted=all&r=0> (accessed 2/28/13). Whether this would represent a rupture in the ruling coalition or merely a further testament to its resilience is unclear.

<sup>22</sup> See: Anne Marie Baylouny, “Militarizing Welfare: Neo-Liberalism and Jordanian Policy,” *Middle East Journal* 62:2 (2008).

<sup>23</sup> See: Bruce Riedel, “With Prince Muqrin's Appointment, Saudi Succession Crisis Looms,” *The Daily Beast* 2/13/13. Available at: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/02/03/with-prince-muqrin-s-appointment-saudi-succession-crisis-looms.html> (accessed 2/28/13).



princes is a large one; the distribution of power among them is a key structural component of Saudi Arabia's political future.

The next generation includes a handful of leading contenders to power. The front runners include key powerbrokers in the three power ministries of the kingdom: the Interior Ministry, headed by Muhammad bin Nayef, the Defense Ministry, whose Deputy Minister is Khaled bin Sultan, and the National Guard, led by Mutaib bin Abdullah.<sup>24</sup> Thus, each exercises control over a fiefdom created by their respective fathers, Prince Nayef (interior), Prince Sultan (defense) and King Abdullah (National Guard). Since the start of the Arab Spring in early 2011, Prince Sultan and Prince Nayef have passed away while holding the position of crown prince. Succession looms and positioning may depend less on the individuals than on the coalition they are able to muster.

In 2006 King Abdullah formed the "Allegiance Council," consisting of surviving sons of Abdul Aziz and several grandsons. The council is intended to serve as a mechanism for curtailing open succession disputes and reaching consensus. The events that unfold come decision time are unlikely to be as opaque as they might have otherwise been, due, in part, to the explosion of cyber-activism.<sup>25</sup> The revolution may have been televised; the succession will be tweeted.

### **Economic**

A key consequence of the Arab Spring is the reintroduction of the politics of inequality into the public arena, with the staggering wealth and corruption of the ruling classes (particularly in Egypt and Tunisia) often taking center stage. The past two years also witnessed tremendous economic challenges for countries lacking oil and natural gas wealth, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Syria.

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<sup>24</sup> Alongside these three are other candidates, including another son of recently deceased and longtime Interior Minister Nayef, Saud bin Nayef (recently appointed as governor of the Eastern Province), as well as the man he replaced, former Eastern Province governor Muhammad bin Fahd; other longer shots include Mecca Province governor Khalid bin Faisal, businessman al-Waleed bin Talal and former Minister of State Abdul-Aziz bin Fahd. Useful short profiles of the leading contenders are available at this blog (written by a Western-educated English-language Saudi blogger): <http://riyadhbureau.com/succession/> (accessed 2/28/13).

<sup>25</sup> Mujtahidd has weighed in on the controversy, believing that Muhammad bin Nayef is at the moment best positioned. See: Yazan al-Saadi, "Saudi Succession: The Battle to Be King," *Al-Akhbar* 10/16/12. Available at: <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12988> (accessed 2/28/13).

## *Jordan*

Jordan is one of the most economically volatile countries in the region. The country's sizeable wealthy elite is increasingly mired in scandals involving ostentation and corruption.<sup>26</sup> Growing economic grievances in both the Jordanian countryside and the poor areas ringing the capital Amman have led to rioting and could prove explosive. Jordan's Hashemite monarchy has for many years relied heavily on external rents.<sup>27</sup> By monetizing its important geostrategic location, the Jordanian regime has allowed its citizens to, on average, have a higher economic standard of living than in neighboring Syria and Egypt. So long as outside financiers are willing to invest in the regime, it appears economically solvent.

In November 2012, as the winter months approached, budgetary woes forced the Jordanian government to cut fuel subsidies, including those on gasoline and cooking gas.<sup>28</sup> The government's reasoning was clear: disruption in supplies of Egyptian gas had doubled Jordan's energy bill, forcing the government to shift more burden on individual consumers. Drawing a parallel with Europe, the government argued that austerity measures were needed to bring its deficit under control.<sup>29</sup> As had been the case in 1989 and 1996, the subsidy cuts were accompanied by days of protest and rioting, after which normalcy returned. The cuts remained in place.

Calculated austerity measures, along with continued external rents, can keep the Jordanian economy afloat. The ruling coalition's coercive component has been able to absorb protests to

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<sup>26</sup> For more on corruption see: David Schenker, "Will Jordan Be the First Arab Monarchy to Fall?" *The Atlantic* 1/8/13. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/01/will-jordan-be-the-first-arab-monarchy-to-fall/266897/> (accessed 2/28/13).

<sup>27</sup> The term "external rents" broadly refers to foreign economic assistance. The United States and the Gulf Petromonarchies are the two largest providers of external rents to the Jordanian regime.

<sup>28</sup> Details on the cuts available at: Omar Obeidat "Gov't should allow private sector to import oil derivatives — economists," *The Jordan Times* 11/15/12. Available at: <http://www.albawaba.com/business/jordan-fuel-subsidy-protest-451061> (accessed 2/28/13). For the protests that followed, see: Ziad Abu-Rish, "Getting Past the Brink: Protests and the Possibilities of Change in Jordan," *Jaddaliyya* 11/15/12. Available at: [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8375/getting-past-the-brink\\_protests-and-the-possibilit](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8375/getting-past-the-brink_protests-and-the-possibilit) (accessed 2/28/13).

<sup>29</sup> The statement is available at: [http://www.jordanembassyus.org/new/pr/prdocs/Jordan\\_Protests\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.jordanembassyus.org/new/pr/prdocs/Jordan_Protests_White_Paper.pdf) (accessed 2/28/13).

cuts in social welfare support. The regime's dependence on external rents, though, ties its fate to that of its benefactors. An attempt to institutionalize this dependence was made in 2011, when Morocco and Jordan were set to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This was accompanied by a pledge of \$5 billion for development plans, but it never came to fruition. Instead, it was replaced by hefty bilateral grants, particularly from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. There is no reason to think that Gulf countries will change this policy in the near future.<sup>30</sup>

### *Saudi Arabia.*

Barring exogenous, unpredictable shocks to the world economy as a whole, Saudi Arabia – the world's largest oil-producing country – is unlikely to face significant economic threats in the near future. Despite growing inequality and continued corruption within the royal family, economic grievances are unlikely to translate into mass discontent in the near term. The king has used spending programs – starting with a \$37 billion one in February 2011 – to effectively preempt or diffuse popular discontent. There is no reason to think this will cease being the kingdom's preferred means of dealing with economic discontent.

### **Social**

The social dimension here refers to ethnic, political-economic, religious, and regional cleavages and their potential as sources of instability. This is especially true when cleavages overlap, as is the case in Bahrain, where the Shi'a majority is politically and economically disenfranchised, as is the case with the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. Social cleavages, particularly ethno-sectarian ones, can be activated and used for mobilization in periods of civil strife. Social cleavages often overlap with key constituencies that make up the ruling coalition.

### *Jordan*

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<sup>30</sup> See: Abdulaziz Sager, "Jordan: Between Economic Crisis and the GCC Response," *Asharq al-Awsat (English)* 1/25/13. Available at: <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=2&id=32684> (accessed 2/28/13).

Jordan's broadest social cleavage is between Palestinians and East Bankers.<sup>31</sup> Broadly speaking, the Palestinian population has been identified with urban and semi-urban populations. The main opposition party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), is considered to have strong Palestinian representation. Jordanian Palestinians can hardly be considered a monolithic group. The diversity of the Palestinian population and the absence of another social cleavage, such as socioeconomic class or religion, that clearly overlaps with the Palestinian identity, though, dampen the likelihood of it becoming a source of instability on its own.

The same can be said of Jordan's East Bank population. Considered the traditional backbone of the monarchy, some groups in southern Jordan have lost the patronage they once enjoyed; unrest fueled by a sense of relative deprivation, particularly vis-à-vis Palestinian Jordanians, would manifest itself only in certain parts of rural Jordan. As with Jordan's Palestinians, the East Bankers are a diverse group.

Refugees continue to stream across the border from Syria, creating a new challenge to the Jordanian regime. An immigrant population partially dependent on international assistance, with members able to compete for jobs and services with Jordanian citizens, could exacerbate political and economic pressures. Jordanian security forces have already intervened to quell demonstrations among residents of the overcrowded Zaatari refugee camp near the Syrian border. An inability to properly deal with the impact of refugees could ignite broader social discontent within a country that has been the preferred destination for Palestinian, Iraqi and now Syrian refugees.

### *Saudi Arabia*

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<sup>31</sup> The East Bankers are those who lived in contemporary Jordan prior to the arrival of the first wave of Palestinian refugees in 1948. The name refers to the east bank of the Jordan River. Jordan's Palestinian population, meanwhile, includes those residing in Jordan who lived in current Israeli and Palestinian territories prior to 1948, as well as their descendants. The demographic balance is contested, but Jordanian Palestinians are believed to comprise a bit more than half of the territory's total population. For more on this see: *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (IX): Dallying with Reform in a Divided Jordan*, Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°118, 12 March 2012. Available at: [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Jordan/118-popular-protest-in-north-africa-and-the-middle-east-ix-dallying-with-reform-in-a-divided-jordan.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Jordan/118-popular-protest-in-north-africa-and-the-middle-east-ix-dallying-with-reform-in-a-divided-jordan.pdf) (accessed 2/28/13).

Saudi Arabia's most pressing social challenge, as has already been noted, is the growing tension between the Sunni-Wahhabi ruling coalition and the Shi'a in the country's east.<sup>32</sup> Despite living above one of the kingdom's principal oil deposits, the eastern Shi'a population is politically and economically marginalized. However, they represent a small percentage of the total population and, consequently, are unlikely alone to threaten the kingdom's ruling coalition.<sup>33</sup>

Saudi Arabia has other fault lines that are less pronounced and contained within the ruling coalition. A key – albeit fuzzy – one is between traditionalists and modernizers. The growing presence of Salafi groups throughout the region notwithstanding, the driving force behind the Arab Spring was participatory, and the Arab Spring *zeitgeist* embodies a direct challenge rather than a confirmation of the social order prescribed by Saudi Wahhabism. In Saudi Arabia, the Arab Spring trend is represented by the “modernizers,” including women's rights organizations and liberal secular intellectuals. Continued mobilization of modernizers could expose fissures within the ruling coalition, particularly if the urban youth disgruntled by regime policies mobilize.<sup>34</sup>

Latent regional cleavages also exist in Saudi Arabia, most importantly among the Hijazis of the western coast, where Mecca and Medina are located, and the Najdis of central Saudi Arabia, where the ruling family comes from. The ruling bargain, in which the Wahhabi establishment grants the Al Saud family legitimacy as the rulers of Islam's holy sites, is a recent phenomenon, despite attempts to frame it otherwise.<sup>35</sup> Although regional cleavages have not been exacerbated by the Arab Spring, they may become more salient in the context of generational succession.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> There is also a Shi'a community living in the southwestern corner along the border with Yemen, although it is of a different Shi'a denomination (Ismaili) and numbers even fewer.

<sup>33</sup> Exact numbers are hard to come by, but it is likely somewhere in the 5-10% range.

<sup>34</sup> See for instance: Bruce Riedel, “Revolution in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?” *The Daily Beast* 1/20/13. Available at: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/01/20/revolution-in-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia.html> (accessed 2/28/13).

<sup>35</sup> An excellent recently published general resource on Saudi Arabia is: Andrew Hammond, “The Islamic Utopia: The Illusion of Reform in Saudi Arabia” (Pluto Press, 2012)

<sup>36</sup> An example of how regional constituencies and succession politics will overlap can be seen in the Eastern Province, where Muhammad bin Fahd (another politically powerful member of the new generation) was recently released, allegedly on his own request, as governor. He was replaced by Saud bin Nayef, brother of the interior minister. One interpretation sees the need for stronger security in the region; this reshuffling, as will most political moves henceforth, is likely to have consequences for and also be motivated by the upcoming succession.

## Regional/International

Although Arab Spring protests were driven by domestic factors, their impact on the regional order is significant. The fluid and ongoing regional reconfigurations will affect both Jordan and Saudi Arabia. They will be driven by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in which Jordan is a front-line state, and by the competition for regional influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

### *Jordan*

The Jordanian regime has used its location to extract “geostrategic rents.”<sup>37</sup> Among Arab countries, it is arguably the United States’ most reliable ally and only one of two Arab countries that have a peace treaty with Israel.<sup>38</sup> By tying its fate to Israel and the West, the Jordanian regime may be forced to play an unpopular role in any future development in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This would trigger social discontent within Jordan’s Palestinian population. Israeli leadership remains coy on how it might deal with its “demographic time-bomb,” but there is little doubt that Jordan would be central to whatever policy Israel might pursue.<sup>39</sup>

Over the past decade, Jordan has maintained relatively good relations with all its neighbors. Fears that events in Syria would force Jordanian authorities to fully break with Syria’s ruling coalition have not materialized. Several concerns about Syria remain. First is the economic impact. Syria is an important trading partner with Jordan, as well as a source of cheap labor. Although new economic benefits may outweigh the losses, as was the case with the Iraqi Civil War, new types of resources linked to Syrian stabilization need to be channeled differently. Second is the impact of refugees. Having coped with major influxes of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, Jordan now has a growing population of Syrian refugees. Intercommunal tensions are

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<sup>37</sup> The term “geostrategic rents” refers to foreign economic assistance provided largely on the basis of a country’s strategic location.

<sup>38</sup> Unlike Egypt (the other one), there is regime continuity in Jordan since the peace treaty. The future direction of Egypt’s foreign policy remains uncertain, given the political changes that country has undergone.

<sup>39</sup> The extreme version of this involves making Jordan a key component of the future Palestinian state. A less mild one is confederation, for which see, for instance: Daoud Kuttub, “Are the Palestinians Ready to Share a State With Jordan?” *The Atlantic* 12/26/12. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/12/are-the-palestinians-ready-to-share-a-state-with-jordan/266634/> (accessed 2/28/13).

likely to increase with a sizeable refugee population. Finally, the presence of strong jihadi groups next door – many with Jordanian membership – increases the threat of home-grown terrorism.

### *Saudi Arabia*

Saudi Arabia's principal concern is Iranian influence in the region. Iran's claims to be the Islamic vanguard have locked the two in a fierce competition for regional supremacy since 1979. The cold peace that has reigned in their relations could be disrupted were Iran to gain nuclear capabilities. In any armed confrontation with Iran, Saudi Arabia is a likely target for the Islamic Republic. The Shi'a issue is therefore likely to remain latent.<sup>40</sup>

Saudi Arabia's principal cross-border concerns come from Yemen in the south, Bahrain in the east, and Kuwait in the northeast. All three of these states are considered to be within the kingdom's sphere of influence. Potential for renewed friction with Iraq is also possible. In all cases, Saudi Arabia's concerns can be framed in the context of its competition with Iran.

Saudi Arabia's broader concern with Yemen is a loss of influence. Diffusion of authority in Yemen could allow subnational groups hostile or ambivalent toward the kingdom to grow. The Huthis in Sa'dah Province and certain factions within the southern separatist movement are often accused of receiving Iranian assistance. Saudi Arabia has already intervened militarily along its border against the Huthi rebels. Its intervention can at best be considered mildly successful and at worst an abject failure. The porous border between the two countries could become harder to control with a full retrenchment of the Yemeni state.

Saudi Arabia's concerns about Bahrain are well known. The possibility of popular regime overthrow in Bahrain led Saudi authorities to prop up the monarchy there. Events in Bahrain combine the Saudi ruling coalition's two worst fears: monarchical overthrow via popular revolt and Shi'a overthrow of Sunni rule. Bahrain's proximity to Saudi Arabia's own restive and

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<sup>40</sup> There is a good overview on the various tensions between the two available at: Anthony H. Cordesman and Robert M. Shelala II, "The Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula (Third Edition)," CSIS 1/7/13. Available at: [http://csis.org/files/publication/120228\\_Iran\\_Ch\\_VI\\_Gulf\\_State.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120228_Iran_Ch_VI_Gulf_State.pdf) (accessed 2/28/13).

similarly disenfranchised Shi'a population heightens these concerns. Protests in Bahrain are unlikely to simply dissipate. Bahrain will remain a concern for Saudi Arabia.

Finally, the situation in Kuwait is one in which – as in Jordan – the monarchy is being called on to reform through official political channels, yet has proven reluctant to do so. As with Jordan, the situation in Kuwait is not yet explosive; nonetheless, the prospects of reform or political disturbances in a country strategically located between Saudi Arabia and Iran will certainly be carefully observed in the kingdom.

### **PART THREE: Conclusion**

The importance of post-Arab Spring hereditary successions is evident. In all four “successful” Arab Spring cases (Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Tunisia), the elderly ruler seemed intent on maintaining power within his family. In Syria and Bahrain (as in Jordan and Morocco), hereditary succession took place nearly a decade earlier. Succession is looming in Saudi Arabia, and consequently the country bears close attention.

At a regional level, the monarchical solidarity between the GCC countries and Jordan and Morocco is of great importance. By banding together, the politically flexible monarchies (Jordan and Morocco) have gained access to vast economic resources, arguably allowing them to weather the Arab Spring. Additionally, the GCC monarchies have bolstered their own legitimacy, portraying themselves as a legitimate form of government in the region rather than an oil-soaked Gulf anachronism. All is not rosy, however. This arrangement makes non-GCC monarchies, Jordan in particular, more brittle, presumably the political price for Saudi economic largesse. While this alliance may temporarily strengthen the resilience of all Arab monarchies, it is unlikely to be a long-term solution. By pushing against the democratic and participatory spirit of the Arab Spring, the Arab monarchies are taking on a formidable foe.